The United States National Security Strategy under Bush and Obama: Continuity and Change

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Abstract

The foreign policy of states determines the way they behave in the international arena. Accurate analysis of official foreign policy documents of a country is helpful in that it shows what the international priorities of a country are at specific periods. This article reviews the U.S. National Security Strategy documents published in 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2015 from the perspective of the *perception of threats to the U.S. security* and *perception of the U.S. role in the world.* It tries to study the differences and similarities between the Bush and Obama administrations in this regard using a Neoclassical Realist framework. The results show that the Obama administration identified a wider range of threat sources to U.S. national security while providing less detailed solutions to them. Also, as democracy promotion abroad ceased to be a priority in 2015, compared to 2002 and 2006, counterterrorism continues to be at the top of U.S. security agenda. In line with Neoclassical Realism, creation of an international order under U.S. leadership is an important priority mentioned in the NSS of 2015.

Keywords: foreign policy, grand strategy, international system, neoclassical realism, U.S. National Security Strategy.

1. Introduction

National security and its preservation are among the most crucial responsibilities of nation-states. The common practice of most states to determine important national security priorities, is to develop documents that define national security, refer to their perception of threats, and numerate suggested ways to preserve national security. Policymakers develop strategy by identifying national interests, prioritizing goals to achieve them, and arraying instruments of national power in their attainment (Reese, 2013: 2). Being a global power, the United States' way of defining its national security priorities affects world politics.

The article will review four U.S. National Security Strategies, two of which were published during the George W. Bush administration in 2002 and 2006, and the other two under Barack Obama in 2010 and 2015. It will use the main assumptions of Neoclassical Realism to see how similar or different the two presidents' strategies were regarding the role played by the U.S. in the international environment. It makes use of a descriptive method. Data is mainly driven from the texts of the U.S. NSS of 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2015, but the analysis also uses library sources.

The National Security Strategy of the United States is a document published roughly every four years. It sets out the principles and priorities to guide the use of American power and influence in the world (the U.S. NSS, 2015). The document usually consists of about 50 pages and presents a picture of the perceived position of U.S. power and influence in the world at a specific time period. It also contains a general description of the most crucial threats to U.S. national security, as well as headlines necessary strategies or policies to deal with them. The importance of such documents is that actual security strategies are usually based on what the U.S. perceives as its sources of power, as well as its limitations.

It is useful here to review the works of other researchers. Gray (2011) reviews the U.S. NSS documents of the Bush administration and compares them with the NSS 2010 under Obama. Titled "President Obama's 2010 United States National Security Strategy and International Law on the Use of Force", the article focuses on the three documents' approach toward the issue of engagement with the international community. It considers the implications of the documents for international law on the use of force and concludes that Obama's 2010 U.S. NSS stresses diplomacy and a multilateral approach that is very different from that of its 2002 and 2006 predecessors. Gray (2011) finally states that despite the change of tone, Obama still maintains that the United States is at war and still seeks to defeat the "far-reaching network of hatred and violence" by military means. According to Gray (2011: 53), although Obama abandons Bush's language of the "global war on terror", and claims to be committed to moral leadership, there is a danger that "Obama, like his predecessor, will prefer to operate under the "law of 9/11" rather than the rule of law in his use of targeted killings outside the battlefield."

In "the democracy tradition in US foreign policy and the Obama presidency", Bouchet (2013) tries to make a comparison between the Obama administration and his predecessors only in one of the aspects covered in NSS documents; that is democracy promotion. He distinguishes three levels at which the notion of democratization of other countries is desirable for the United States: the ideational level, the strategic level and the policy level. Further, he reviews a history of America's influence overseas regarding the issue of democracy promotion. His final analysis, however, focuses on the Obama administration and the conclusion is that although different approaches have been adopted by successive administrations, "there has been a great degree of continuity in US democracy promotion since at least the Reagan years" (Bouchet, 2013: 51). The author also believes

that Obama will follow the line of his predecessors, and there would be no major shift in this trend.

Another article, published after the U.S. NSS 2010 was released, compares the way the two 2002 and 2006 NSSs addressed the issues of pre-emptive self-defense, necessary force and humanitarian intervention, with the one commonly known and expressed in the U.S. NSS 2010 as the Obama doctrine. In "The 2010 United States National Security Strategy and the Obama Doctrine of 'Necessary Force'", Henderson (2010) argues that although the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war did not prove to be a successful one, Obama's conceptualization of "necessary force" caries even more the meaning of "unilateral forcible humanitarian intervention under what appears to be a revised version of the 'just war' doctrine." The author believes Obama's explanations about the "necessity" of the use of force as the "last resort" makes the concept even "more vague and open to unilateral possibilities than the Bush doctrine and ultimately cannot be reconciled with the contemporary limits imposed by the *jus ad bellum.*"

Thematically speaking, "integration" is what Bialasiewicz et al. (2007) finds in all post 9/11 NSS documents: "integration into a western and American set of values and *modus operandi*– has become the new strategic concept." By this, he means that recent U.S. security strategies focus on an alignment for counter-terrorism.

2. Theoretical framework

Much of the scholastic debate regarding international politics is usually at the level of theory development. International relations theories deal with the causes and effects of states' interactions, the reasons behind individual state behavior in the international arena and probable changes and processes of the international system. Many of such theories, thus, are those

which focus on the foreign policy of states, trying to explain how any individual state's foreign policy is shaped and how it is affected by domestic or international factors.

Rose (1998) argues that foreign policy theory development at the level "to explain what states try to achieve in the external realm and when they try to achieve it" has received little attention. He refers to four main schools of foreign policy development: 1. Innenpolitik, 2. Offensive realism, 3. Defensive realism, and 4. Neoclassical realism.

Innenpolitik regards foreign policy as a direct outcome of domestic politics. In this approach, internal factors such as "political and economic ideology, national character, partisan politics or socioeconomic structure" (Rose, 1998) of countries determine how they behave in the international arena. As an example of such viewpoint, Rose (1998) refers to the idea that in general, democracies behave differently from non-democracies. Summarizing the whole idea behind all Innenpolitik theories, he states that in these approaches in order to analyze the behavior of a particular state, "one should peer inside the black box and examine the preferences and configurations of key domestic actors." Rose (1998) believes that *Innenpolitik* theories fail to account for why states with similar domestic structures behave differently, and dissimilar states adopt similar foreign policies in similar situations.

Two other theories of foreign policy development are offensive and defensive realism both of which assume that the international system is composed of rational states whose most important priority is security maximization. Offensive realists take a Hobbesian stance by stating that states try to maximize their security by augmenting their relative advantages. From this viewpoint, states, trying to achieve security, may give rise to conflicts in the international scene. It is the international system and situation that determine the behavior of states and domestic differences between states is given minimal attention.

Defensive realists, too, perceive the international system as anarchic but they do not assume that security in this system is scarce. Through experience, states can learn that they can maintain their security only by responding to external threats, which are usually rare. Even when threatened, their response is mainly in the form of balancing against the source of threat and does not lead to actual conflict. In this framework, foreign policy consists of the reactions of rational states to the international system, taking into account the fact that they do not welcome conflict unless there is a real threat to their security.

Neoclassical realism rejects the basics of the three mentioned approaches. Innenpolitik theories are rejected because if one is to assume that there is only one factor that shapes foreign policy of states, that has to be the relative power of that country in the international system and not its domestic politics. It also challenges defensive and offensive realism because the two theories only emphasize countries' responses to external threats and neglect the fact that such a response depends on the perceptions a particular state has of its threats, and that the perception of threats itself depends partly on the country's material power.

Neoclassical realism takes into consideration a combination of the external and systemic, as well as internal and unit-level factors affecting the foreign policy of states:

> [It] explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realists. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and

complex, because system pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical (Rose, 1998).

Mononen (2008) refers to Fareed Zakaria as a prominent author related to the neoclassical trend of realism and says that according to Zakaria (1992, in Mononen, 2008), a theory of foreign policy should first pay attention to the effects of the international system on the national behavior of a country, because the most important characteristic of a state in international relations is its relative position in the whole system. A comprehensive theory then, has to consider "domestic politics", "national culture" or "individual decision makers" (Mononen, 2008) of countries to be able to explain a particular state's foreign policy.

Another realist assumption of the approach is that the international system is anarchic and "there exists no universal sovereign" (Mononen, 2008).

"Instead of assuming that states seek security, neoclassical realists assume that states respond to uncertainties of the international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment" (Rose, 1998). But anarchy is not an independent factor that shapes the foreign behavior of states. In fact, neoclassical realists focus less on characteristics of the system and pay more attention to explaining specific foreign policy decisions. Therefore, unit-level factors, though playing a secondary role after a state's relative material power compared to rivals, become important. Because it is political leaders and elites who make actual foreign policy decisions, their perceptions of the country's power, matter.

Another important assumption of the theory is that states want to maximize their influence (Mononen, 2008). In fact, unlike defensive and offensive realists who believe that states'

main aim is security maximization, neoclassical realists say that states try to direct the international system toward their objectives and preferences. Therefore, the more powerful a state is, the more influential it becomes.

Kitchen (2010: 117) makes reference to Rose (1998) and other authors who have written about Neoclassical Realism, but reproduces the theory with an emphasis on grand strategy development processes. Kitchen (2010) explains that policy makers try to design the overall course of the operations of their countries in the anarchic world of the international system. These designs are based on certain principles, are much broader than the day-to-day plans of what has to be done, and are called *strategies*:

> Yet just as international politics is not solely about waging war, strategy is not just the art of winning wars, but is a more complex and multilayered undertaking (Kennedy, 1991). Grand strategy therefore encompasses not only military means and ends, but the means and ends of politics, economics and ideology, in short all the aspects of power and influence at a nation's– and therefore, a statesman's– disposal (Basil & Liddell, 1991).

Grand strategy is the point where systemic and unit level factors converge (Ben, 2006 in Kitchen, 2010) and determines the attitude of states toward the international environment. Trying to provide a Neoclassical Realist model of grand strategy formation, he explains that it is a "top-down" process: "leaders define the 'national interests' and conduct foreign policy based on their assessment of relative power and other states' intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints" (Taliaferro in Kitchen, 2010).

As Kitchen (2010) states, the first step of grand strategy

formation in Neoclassical Realism is the identification of threats. This stage takes into consideration the geopolitical structure of the international system and the most important national interests and factors that threaten them. The second step includes identification of the means to deal with threats. Here, the issues of availability and efficiency of means are involved and there is the possibility that different actors within the state have competing ideas about the way to make use of means, or they may have different ethical considerations about the operational procedures of the task. At the third stage, the state defines auxiliary goals and identifies the appropriate means to attain them. Finally, Kitchen (2010) regards Neoclassical Realism as a structural theory of international relations which provides insights on the composition of the international system.

3. Findings and analysis

As mentioned in the introduction, this article uses Neoclassical Realism to study the similarities and differences between the two U.S. NSS documents released under the Bush administration and those released under Obama. The findings and their analysis are categorized under two subtitles: *threats to U.S. national security* and *the U.S. role in the international system*. The article uses the following theoretical assumptions:

1. Grand strategy formation takes place in a three step phenomena: identification of threats, identification of means to deal with them, identification of auxiliary goals.

2. States define their foreign policy based on the perception of their relative power, especially material power in the international system.

3. Instead of seeking security, states respond to

uncerties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment. States try to direct the international system toward their objectives and preferences. Therefore, the more powerful a state is, the more influential it becomes.

4. Unit-level factors, are important after systemic factors, because it is political leaders and elites who make actual foreign policy decisions. Thus, their perceptions of their countries' power matter.

3.1. Threats to U.S. national security

America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones (the U.S. NSS, 2002).

Being published a year after the 9/11 attacks, the NSS 2002 identifies terrorism as the main source of threat to U.S. national security. The threat is assumed to originate from two sources: 1. Terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda (assumed to originate from the miseries of suppressed groups within weak states), and 2. States seeking to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction.

The document attributes the following to such states. They are states that:

- "brutalize their own people and squander their national resources for the personal gain of the rulers;

- display no regard for international law, threaten their neighbors, and callously violate international treaties to which they are party;

- are determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction, along with other advanced military technology, to be used as threats or offensively to achieve the aggressive designs of these regimes;

- ▪ sponsor terrorism around the globe; and

- ▪ reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands" (the U.S. NSS, 2002).

Preparing minds for the Iraq attack , the document proposes that in order to ensure America's homeland security, the state has to prevent "terrorists" from having access to technologies used for the production of WMD. Counter-proliferation efforts are therefore the solution to the threat:

> We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed. … We will enhance diplomacy, arms control, multilateral export controls, and threat reduction assistance that impede states and terrorists seeking WMD, and when necessary, interdict enabling technologies and materials. We will continue to build coalitions to support these efforts, encouraging their increased political and financial support for nonproliferation and threat reduction programs. The recent G-8 agreement to commit up to $20 billion to a global partnership against proliferation marks a major step forward (the U.S NSS, 2002).

Supporting moderate and modern governments, especially in the Muslim world, is among the solutions proposed for the first problem. It is assumed that by doing so "the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation" (the U.S. NSS, 2002). Regional conflicts, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Latina American conflicts, India-Pakistan disputes, and disease and poverty in Africa, are also among the security considerations mentioned in the 2002 document, but are not the focal point.

The 2006 document does not add to the list of threat sources

numerated in 2002, rather, it provides a new classification of threats prepared by the Department of Defense:

- "**Traditional** challenges posed by states employing conventional armies, navies, and air forces in well-established forms of military competition.

- **Irregular** challenges from state and non-state actors employing methods such as terrorism and insurgency to counter our traditional military advantages, or engaging in criminal activity such as piracy and drug trafficking that threaten regional security.

- **Catastrophic** challenges involving the acquisition, possession, and use of WMD by state and non-state actors; and deadly pandemics and other natural disasters that produce WMD-like effects.

- **Disruptive** challenges from state and non-state actors who employ technologies and capabilities (such as biotechnology, cyber and space operations, or directed energy weapons) in new ways to counter military advantages the United States currently enjoys" (the U.S. NSS, 2006).

The 2015 document perceives eight major sources of threat or "risks" to U.S. national security:

- "Catastrophic attack on the U.S. homeland or critical infrastructure;

- Threats or attacks against U.S. citizens abroad and our allies;

- Global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown;

- Proliferation and/or use of weapons of mass destruction;

- Severe global infectious disease outbreaks;

- Climate change;

- Major energy market disruptions; and

- Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime)" (the NSS, 2015).

As one can see, not only does the list contain military issues, it also includes topics such as climate change, economic crisis and global infectious disease outbreaks. This shows that in the designation of such texts, there is a long term perspective which pays attention to *probabilities* as well as actual sources of threat.

As for the solutions to these threats, the document proposes the following strategies:

First, strengthening U.S. national defense is the most important priority, but the pursuit of it, according to the document, is not based on a bigger military or the use of force. Rather, the U.S. should have a smaller military and be selective in its use of force. Instead, it will seek to mobilize allies and partners to share the burden and achieve lasting outcomes. The NSS prescribes the use of force in cases that reflect a clear mandate and feasible objectives, and are effective and legitimate. Second, protecting homeland security against terrorism is regarded as a core responsibility.

3.2. The U.S. role in the international system

In the second step of grand strategy formation in Neoclassical Realism, we must see how the documents identify the means to deal with threats. This is especially related to the role perceived for the U.S. in the international system.

3.2.1. Leading role

Hemmer (2011) refers to the three responsibilities mentioned in the U.S. Constitution for the American government: to "provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty" (U.S. Constitution). These three seem to be present in all administrations' security strategies. For example George W. Bush's 2002 NSS included peace, prosperity and liberty as fundamental goals of the United States. The Obama administration in both 2010 and 2015 strategies, also calls for the three, but they also add a fourth objective: "[a]n international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges" (NSS, 2010). These are known to be American values and constitute the elements of America's global leadership. Expansion of these values is assumed to be crucial for maintaining U.S. security. According to Hemmer (2011), it is possible to imagine that at times the U.S. government, in pursuit of one of the above three goals, would have to sacrifice one or two others; but one could not assume that the fourth dimension, a favorable international order, would be possible in directions other than to be in line with the three objectives of peace, prosperity and liberty for the American people. He further asks if creating such an international order, no matter whether it is in the interest of the United States or not, is an end by itself or it is a means to achieve other objectives.

Beside American values, America's global leadership is another common issue among both the Bush and Obama administrations' NSS documents. While both the 2002 and 2006 Bush administration's NSSs emphasize the necessity of American rule as an unquestioned aspect of American foreign policy, the 2015 document insists that: "A strong consensus endures across our political spectrum that the question is not *whether* America will lead, but *how* we will lead into the future" (U.S. NSS, 2015). It also goes further to numerate the elements of such leadership. Accordingly, America will lead with purpose, it will lead with strength, it will lead by example, it will lead with capable partners, it will lead with all elements of its power, and it will lead with a long term perspective.

The leading role for the U.S. is explicitly mentioned in Hillary Clinton's remarks on the 2010 NSS, expressed on 27 May 2010: "Our approach is to build the diverse sources of American power at home and to shape the global system so that it is more conducive to meeting our overriding objectives: security, prosperity, the explanation and spread of our values, and a just and sustainable international order.".

Both the 2010 and 2015 NSS documents take for granted the homogeneity of U.S. national interests, meaning that the four objectives of peace, prosperity, liberty and the desired global order are in line with each other and never contradict one another. This is important when discussing how the U.S. government has to explain (or justify) many of its activities overseas. The 2010 NSS, for example, reads:

> Military force, at times, may be necessary to defend our country and allies or to preserve broader peace and security, including by protecting civilians facing a grave humanitarian crisis. We will draw on diplomacy, development, and international norms and institutions to help resolve disagreements, prevent conflict, and

maintain peace, mitigating where possible the need for the use of force. … While the use of force is sometimes necessary, we will exhaust other options before war whenever we can, and carefully weigh the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of inaction. When force is necessary, we will continue to do so in a way that reflects our values and strengthens our legitimacy, and we will seek broad international support, working with such institutions as NATO and the U.N. Security Council. The United States must reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests, yet we will also seek to adhere to standards that govern the use of force. Doing so strengthens those who act in line with international standards, while isolating and weakening those who do not" (U.S. NSS, 2010: 22).

As the text clearly shows, the preservation of values justifies the use of force, military action and unilateral action against those who do not operate within U.S. standards. This is in line with what Bush's 2002 NSS calls the "union of our values and our national interests" (U.S. NSS, 2002) and fails to account for the inconsistency or irony which is logically present in the assumption that *all good things can go together* or *means justify ends.* Davidson (2015) mentions that the three words of "lead", "leadership" and "leader" appear 94 times in Obama's 2015 document.

3.2.2. Counterterrorism

Among the above mentioned elements of leadership is to cooperate with capable partners. Here comes the issue of multilateralism and unilateralism. After the 9/11 attacks, Bush's proposal to reform security measures gained national consensus. The *Office of the Director of National Intelligence* and the

National Counterterrorism Center were created. The U.S. PATRIOT ACT was passed at this time with the aim of putting limitations on some civil liberties of U.S. citizens, mainly immigrants, to guarantee national security and combat terrorism.

In Sec. 202 of the Patriot Act, government officials are given the authority to conduct a 'roving wiretap', that is, to wiretap any communication that is allegedly related to terrorist actions, and they are also allowed to share the information on criminal investigations including foreign intelligence and counterintelligence. The concept of domestic terrorism refers to: "activities that (A) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; (B) appear to be intended: (i) to intimidate or coerce the civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States" (the U.S. Patriot Act, Title VII, Sec. 802). As one can see, it is a very wide definition and accounts for the 'global scope' of measures to be applied abroad, without paying much attention to the sovereignty of other states and international regulations. Under this law, about 1,200 people were detained for months without access to lawyers or the release of their names Rowen (n.d.) believes that although the law set several limitations on the civil liberties of American citizens, the discourse behind it found legitimacy because of the morality it was supposed to guarantee. The moral aspects were summed up in the idea that the leading role played by the United States in the world was to guarantee peace and freedom (Romano, 2011: 166). This, justifies the rationale for preventive attacks against emerging enemies. Steinberg (2005) summarizes it by stating: "A careful examination of the history, rationale, costs and benefits of using preventive force suggests that, while rare, preventive force has a legitimate role to play in tackling some of

the most dangerous security problems facing the United States and the wider international community."

3.2.3. Democracy promotion

Another important difference between the Bush and Obama National Security Strategies regarding America' role, was the emphasis in the Bush administration on the U.S. responsibility to promote democracy in other regions of the world, either in the form of democracy formation or supporting recently formed democracies. The antiterrorist policy of the Bush administration established a relationship between democracy and security that implied the limitation of the former as a necessary condition for the achievement of the latter (Romano, 2011: 159). In fact, it was regarded as a necessity for guaranteeing the security of the American people:

> Development reinforces diplomacy and defense, reducing long-term threats to our national security by helping to build stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies. Improving the way we use foreign assistance will make it more effective in strengthening responsible governments, responding to suffering, and improving people's lives. … Transformational diplomacy means working with our many international partners to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system (U.S. NSS, 2006).

Romano (2011) attributes this emphasis to the perception that since democracies are the 'most responsible members in the international scenario', promoting this system of government is the most effective measure "to reinforce internal stability, reduce regional conflict and counteract terrorism.". Berkowitz (2004, in Romano, 2011) believes that "United States

democracy and its security depends on the capacity to expand this political regime to the rest of the world.". Democracy promotion is usually cheaper than war, both economically and humanely. The main elements of this effort include both the expansion of free markets as well as the expansion of liberal democracies. The NSS 2006, for example, asserts the necessity of economic and political development of weak states:

> Effective economic development advances our national security by helping promote responsible sovereignty, not permanent dependency. Weak and impoverished states and ungoverned areas are not only a threat to their people and a burden on regional economies, but are also susceptible to exploitation by terrorists, tyrants, and international criminals. We will work to bolster threatened states, provide relief in times of crisis, and build capacity in developing states to increase their progress (U.S. NSS, 2006).

These are among the reasons presented to justify preemptive war to combat terrorism. Intervention, is thus seen as the solution to bring peace and stability.

The 2010 and 2015 documents, however, do not try to build such a direct relationship between U.S. security and democracy promotion. Under the subtitle related to the promotion of U.S. "values", the 2010 states that the U.S. has to *"Promote Democracy and Human Rights Abroad"* (the U.S. NSS, 2010: 37). The suggested strategies in this regard include:

- "Ensuring that New and Fragile Democracies Deliver Tangible Improvements for Their Citizens.

- Practicing Principled Engagement with Non-Democratic Regimes.

- Recognizing the Legitimacy of All Peaceful Democratic

Movements" (the U.S. NSS, 2010).

The NSS 2105, also contains paragraphs loosely stating that the U.S. will support newly formed democracies, but not putting it among the security priorities, as the Bush administration had done. As Bouchet (2013) states: "Under Obama, the policy infrastructure has not developed on a scale commensurate to that observed under the first Bush, Clinton and the second Bush. There have been no major new legislative initiatives for democracy promotion and no institutional expansion of it within the government agencies." Democracy promotion, therefore, ceases to be a security priority in the NSS of 2010 and 2105.

4. Conclusion

The U.S. National Security Strategy documents published in 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2015 were studied in the current article. Using a Neoclassical Realist framework to analyze the foreign policy development of states, the article tried to review the four documents and the related literature from the two perspectives of *the perceived threats to U.S. national security* and *the role the documents assume for the U.S. in the international system*. The results show that while the two documents released under the Bush administration perceived "terrorism" as the main source of threat to U.S. national security, the 2010 and 2015 documents provide a much more expanded list of threats including not only terrorism, but also climate change and the spread of infectious diseases. The Bush administration documents, however, present much more detailed solutions to the threats, compared with those released under Obama which suffice to more general guidelines.

Based on Neoclassical Realist assumptions, states form their foreign policy based on the perception of their relative power in the international system. The notion of the leading role of the U.S. in the world is repeated in all NSS documents based on the

perception that the country is at an outstanding position compared to other countries since the end of the Cold War. There is no *rival* or real *challenge* to U.S. *power.* Other countries are either *allies* or *adversaries.* The source of this power is revealed as *economic strength* in the NSS 2015. All four documents regard peace, prosperity and liberty as American values as well as ends, the spread and pursuit of which is a crucial overseas responsibility.

The 2010 document however adds a fourth objective to the list: an international order advanced by U.S. leadership to preserve the other three goals. This can be said to be a Neoclassical Realist measure. Accordingly, instead of seeking security, states respond to uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment. States try to direct the international system toward their objectives and preferences. Therefore, the more powerful a state is, the more influential it becomes. As for the other two assumed roles of the U.S., counterterrorism and democracy promotion, while counterterrorism continues to be among the most important priorities of the U.S. in the Obama administration, democracy promotion is less emphasized in the 2010 and 2015 documents.

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